

## **USDA Funds Special Wetlands Initiative in Red River Valley**

*Initiative will help reduce flooding, enhance wildlife habitat*

WASHINGTON, April 20, 2011 – Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack today announced that up to \$10 million will be available to help eligible landowners in three states reduce flooding, restore wetlands and enhance wildlife habitat in the Red River Valley Watershed through the USDA's Wetlands Reserve Program (WRP). The Red River Valley Watershed experiences moderate to severe flooding annually, with record flooding every few years.

"This special initiative funding will expand WRP's ability to mitigate flood damage within the basin by retaining higher levels of flood waters within the easement acres," Vilsack said. "Projects funded through this initiative will reduce the costs to our rural private landowners who continue to experience severe damages during these flood events."

USDA will provide the funding for this special WRP initiative in Minnesota, North Dakota and South Dakota. This additional funding will allow the three states to accept new applications and fund more WRP easements. Restoring wetlands and associated uplands through this initiative will help retain and slow floodwaters in the Red River Valley Watershed, while providing valuable wildlife habitat and reducing damages from severe flooding.

WRP, administered by USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service, is the federal government's largest private lands wetlands restoration program. It provides voluntary technical and financial assistance to private landowners and Indian tribes to restore, protect and enhance wetlands that have been degraded or converted to agricultural uses. More than 80 percent of the restorable wetlands in the Red River Valley are privately owned.

The Red River Retention Authority identified a critical need for targeted technical and financial assistance for eligible landowners in the watershed. WRP projects funded through this special initiative will result in long-term benefits to taxpayers by reducing funding spent by local and state governments to repair damaged roads, bridges and public areas. Reduced damage to cropland and associated disaster and damage payments also will save taxpayers money in the long term.

For more information about WRP, please visit [www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp](http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/programs/wrp).

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